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X-FACTOR
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When superhumanity needs a detective agency, they call upon Madrox the Multiple Man and his mutant team of investigators...

X-FACTOR

Having relocated back to New York because there's only so much business you can get from the Great Lakes Avengers, X-Factor is hired by Franklin and Valeria Richards because their mother, the Invisible Girl, has gone missing. Upon going to the Baxter Building, X-Factor is stonewalled by Reed Richards, while the original stone wall, Ben Grimm, gets into a throw-down with Strong Guy and Shatterstar that results in Ben being literally thrown down, i.e., to the ground. A lone bobby pin on the floor of the Fantasticar allows Longshot to use his psychometric powers to determine that Sue was kidnapped to Latveria, and he encounters in his vision none other than Layla Miller who appears to be allied with Doom. Meanwhile Monet returns, only to be informed by Val Cooper that M's father has been taken prisoner by terrorists who have one demand: Monet herself.

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NO, I COULDN'T RESTRAIN GRIMM. I TRIED TO CONVINCE HIM THAT X-FACTOR WAS NOT WORTH WASTING TIME ON, BUT HE WOULD NOT BE DETERRED.

GRIMM IS A FOOL. PAY HIM NO MIND. X-FACTOR, ON THE OTHER HAND...
THEY COULD PRESENT A PROBLEM.
NOT IF GRIMM DESTROYS THEM. PERHAPS MY BEING UNABLE TO REIN HIM IN WAS FORTUNATE.

YOU'RE A FOOL. GRIMM IS ALL BLUSTER AND ARROGANCE AND EASILY WOUNDED PRIDE...
...BUT HE IS NO KILLER. IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTIES, YOU WILL HAVE TO COUNT ON YOURSELF TO DISPOSE OF THEM.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS MY CHOICE, THOUGH, IS IT? HAD YOU ALLOWED ME TO DO THINGS MY WAY--
THE FACT THAT YOU ATTENDED TO MY WISHES SIMPLY SHOWS YOUR OWN WEAKNESS OF CHARACTER.
I WAS BEING COURTEOUS TO OUR MUTUAL INTERESTS.
COURTEOUS? YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS.

WAIT...

I THINK SOMEONE IS OUT OF BED.

OOOOOF!
VERY FOOLISH, YOUNG LADY.
I AGREE.
I'm *really* starting to *hate* that girl.

THAT GIRL IS GOING TO DRIVE ME INSANE.

LAYLA'S GONE FROM MY LIFE, THEN SHE'S BACK, THEN SHE'S GONE AGAIN, AND NOW...
YOU'RE TALKING TO... LAYLA? IN LATVERIA?
YES. THAT IS--

--THE NAME THAT SHE GAVE ME.
JAMIE IS ASKING IF YOU'RE TALKING TO ME?
THAT'S RIGHT.
TELL HIM I SAID HI.
LAYLA SAYS "HI."

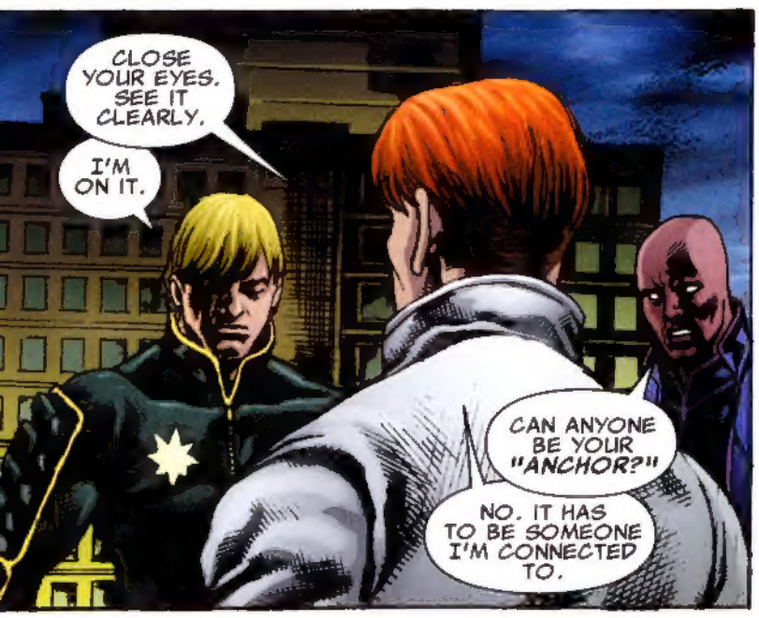
HOW ARE YOU ABLE TO SEE ME?
I CAN'T. THIS HAPPENED DAYS AGO, I JUST KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY.
HOW?
YOU TELL ME. BE SURE TO REMEMBER IT ALL SO WE GET THIS RIGHT. ARE YOU PASSING YOUR HAND THROUGH MY HEAD?
YES.
PLEASE STOP. IT'S ANNOYING.
SORRY. I'LL STOP PASSING MY HAND THROUGH YOUR HEAD.
WHAT'S HER HEAD DOING UP THERE?
SHE'S TALLER NOW.
RIGHT, RIGHT. I FORGOT.
LONGSHOT! TELL HER WE NEED HER HELP TO--!
PUT HER DOWN!
LONGSHOT, WHAT'S GOING--?
YOU CAN'T JUST STAND THERE AND LET THIS HAPPEN, LAYLA! MADROX SAYS WE NEED YOUR HELP!
I KNOW. MADROX HAS BECOME THE MISSING PERSONS POSTER BOY.
BE SURE TO TELL HIM I SAID SO.

I'VE BEEN PATIENT AND ALL I'VE GOTTEN IS THE RUNAROUND!
NOW I WANT ANSWERS!
I ALREADY SPOKE TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT! THEY'RE STONE-WALLING ME! YOU'RE MY OWN DAMNED EMBASSY!
I WANT TO KNOW WHO'S HOLDING MY FATHER! AND IF YOU DON'T TELL ME, I'M GOING TO COME DOWN THERE AND RIP THE INFORMATION OUT OF YOU!
IF YOU'RE LUCKY, I'LL DO IT PSYCHICALLY! OR ELSE I MAY JUST TEAR YOUR BRAIN OUT AND READ IT LIKE A TEA LEAF!
DO I SOUND LIKE SOMEONE WHO CARES IF SHE'D BE CAUSING AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT?!?
WHERE THE HELL IS MY FATHER!?!?
YOU THINK I'M BEING ABUSIVE NOW?! JUST WAIT UNTIL I--
HELLO? HELLO!?
DAMMIT!!!

M? IS THERE...Y'KNOW... ANYTHING I CAN DO?
YOU CAN JUST STAY OUT OF MY WAY, GUIDO.
WANT ME TO HELP YOU FIND HIM?
THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN--
HOW?
BACK BEFORE YOUR TIME, X-FACTOR WAS A GOVERNMENT OUTFIT.
I KNOW, I KNOW. VAL COOPER WAS YOUR CONTACT. BUT SHE'S THE ONE WHO'S KEEPING MUM ABOUT SPECIFICS.
YOU DON'T GO TO THE BIG SHOTS FOR STUFF LIKE THIS.
I MADE SOME HIGH FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES BACK IN THE DAY. DRINKING BUDDIES.
BET WITH A CALL OR TWO, I TURN SOMETHING UP.
BUT I WANT SOMETHING.
I CAN GIVE YOU A HALF MILLION UP FRONT, DOUBLE WHEN I FIND HIM.
I DON'T WANT'CHER MONEY.
WELL, I HOPE YOU'RE NOT SUGGESTING...? I MEAN, I'M DESPERATE, BUT--
JEEZ LOUISE, KID! I JUST WANT IN ON THE RESCUE MISSION! YOU AND ME, KICKIN' TERRORIST BUTT.
OH. WELL... YES, ALL RIGHT.
FINE. CAN I BORROW YOUR PHONE TO MAKE THE--
YEAH, RIGHT, I'LL JUST... USE ONE OF THE COMPANY CELL PHONES.

THE MISSING PERSONS POSTER BOY? WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
I DON'T KNOW. AND I WASN'T ABLE TO HAVE HER CLARIFY IT BECAUSE THE VISION ENDED...
PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY MUST HAVE SET THE FANTASTICAR TO AUTO-RETURN.
WHY THE HELL IS LAYLA WORKING WITH DOCTOR DOOM?
WE DON'T KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT SHE IS.
SHE'S IN *LATVERIA!* SHE SURE AIN'T WORKING FOR THE PEACE CORPS!
YOU HAVE A CLEAR VISION OF WHERE YOU SAW HER?
ABSOLUTELY.
IF YOU CAN SEE IT, I CAN BRING US THERE.
I STILL DON'T GET HOW THAT TRANSPORT THING OF YOURS WORKS.
I GENERATE THE ENERGY AND THE SWORDS FOCUS IT.
BUT I ALWAYS REQUIRE ANOTHER MIND TO ENVISION THE DESTINATION. IT SERVES AS A SORT OF ANCHOR.
WITHOUT THAT, I RISK GETTING LOST BETWEEN.
WHICH WOULD BE BAD.
VERY.
GUIDO! WE'RE *HEADING OUT!*
MEET US ON THE ROOF!

ACCORDING TO SHATTERSTAR, THE ENERGIES RELEASED WHEN HE TRANSPORTS PRETTY MUCH REQUIRE WE BE OUTDOORS.
OTHERWISE WE COULD BLOW UP WHATEVER STRUCTURE WE'RE INSIDE, WHICH WOULD BE--TO QUOTE DARWIN--BAD.


CLOSE YOUR EYES. SEE IT CLEARLY.
I'M ON IT.
CAN ANYONE BE YOUR "ANCHOR?"
NO. IT HAS TO BE SOMEONE I'M CONNECTED TO.

"CONNECTED?"
DON'T ASK.
DON'T TELL.

GUIDO! ABOUT TIME! AND... MONET?

YOU SAID YOU WANTED US TO GIVE YOU SOME DISTANCE.
BUT IF YOU WANT TO COME WITH--

NO. I WANTED TO SUGGEST YOU SEND A DUPE ON THIS MISSION WHILE YOU GO TO IRELAND AND SET THINGS RIGHT WITH TERRY.
AND I'M STAYIN' HERE WITH HER. I MADE SOME CALLS ABOUT HER DAD. I THINK I CAN HELP.
LOOK, GUYS... LET'S TAKE A MOMENT TO--

HEY! I SEE YA UP THERE!
OH, NO.
IF YOU GUYS WANNA BE IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES...
...THEN YOU GOTTA STICK AROUND TO PLAY ALL NINE INNINGS!
SO STAY RIGHT WHERE Y'ARE! 'SPECIALLY YOU, SWORD BOY!

HE ISSUES A CHALLENGE! I CANNOT RUN FROM THAT--!
RIGHT NOW WE NEED YOU MORE THAN YOU NEED TO SHOW HIM YOU CAN BEAT HIM A SECOND TIME!
MONET! CAN YOU RUN INTERFERENCE--?
ABSOLUTELY. I CAN USE SOMETHING LARGE TO HIT AND THIS IS THE PERFECT--
--OPPORTUNITY?
Wow. He looks really pissed off...
LET'S DANCE, CHUMPS!

DON'T TRY TO SLUG IT OUT! USE YOUR TELEPATHY! JUST SLOW HIM DOWN ENOUGH FOR US TO GET CLEAR AND THEN FLY AW--
YOU GUYS GO! I *GOT* HIM!
UNNFFFF!
YOU KEEP *THINKIN'* THAT!

ARRHHH!!!
OH CRAP.
SHE'S GONNA KILL ME.
NOT IF I KILL YA FIRST!
OH, NOT GOOD. NOT GOOD AT--

EH?

OH...
PERFECT!
JUST FREAKIN' PER--!

RIIIIIINGRIII
YEAH, WHAT?! WHO IS IT?
MR. STRONG GUY? THIS IS FRANKLIN RICHARDS...
YEAH, KID, THIS AIN'T THE BEST TIME TO--

WE'RE ON OUR WAY OVER BECAUSE OUR FATHER'S TRYING TO KILL US.
I HOPE THAT WON'T BE A PROBLEM OR ANYTHING.

"THEN PETER KNEW THAT THERE WAS NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE. 'COME,' HE CRIED IMPERIOUSLY...
"...AND SOARED OUT AT ONCE INTO THE NIGHT, FOLLOWED BY JOHN AND MICHAEL AND WENDY."

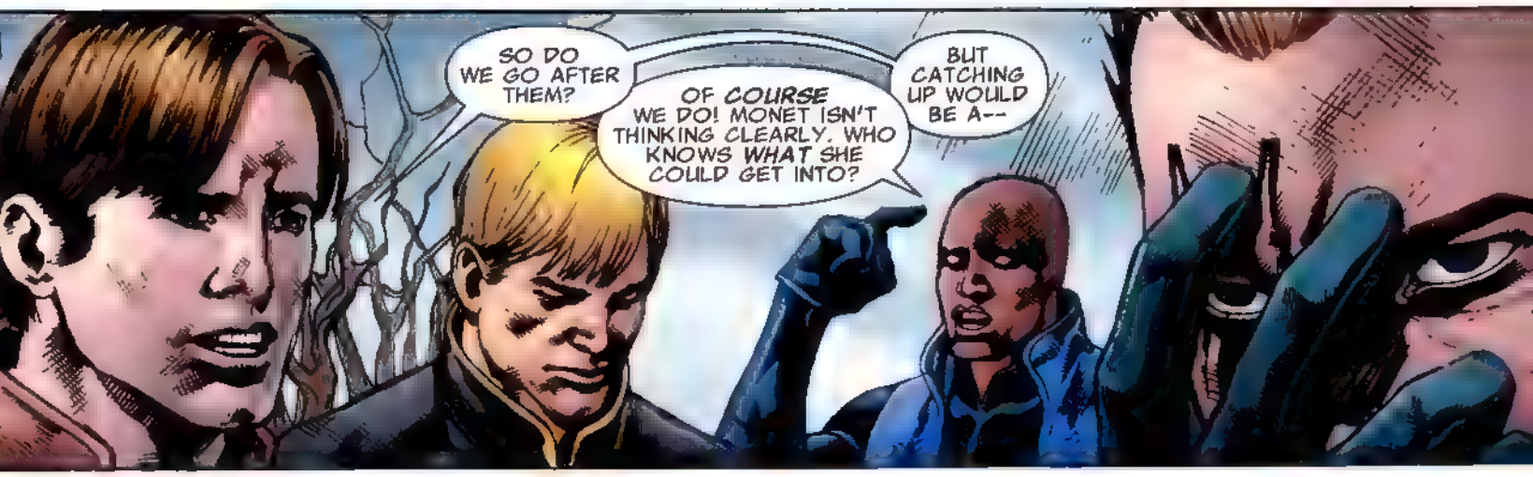
LONGSHOT! DOES THIS LOOK LIKE THE PLACE YOU SAW?
NO. WHEN I SAW IT, IT WAS NIGHT.
ASIDE FROM THAT, I M--
OHHH, THAT'S BAD.
OOOOOFF!
THAT'S WORSE!
YA DON'T GET TO CHUCK ME THROUGH THE WALL AND DROP ME FIFTY STORIES AND GET AWAY WITH IT!
REALLY?
YEAH, REALLY!
HOW ABOUT PUTTING OUT YOUR EYES? DO I GET AWAY WITH THAT?

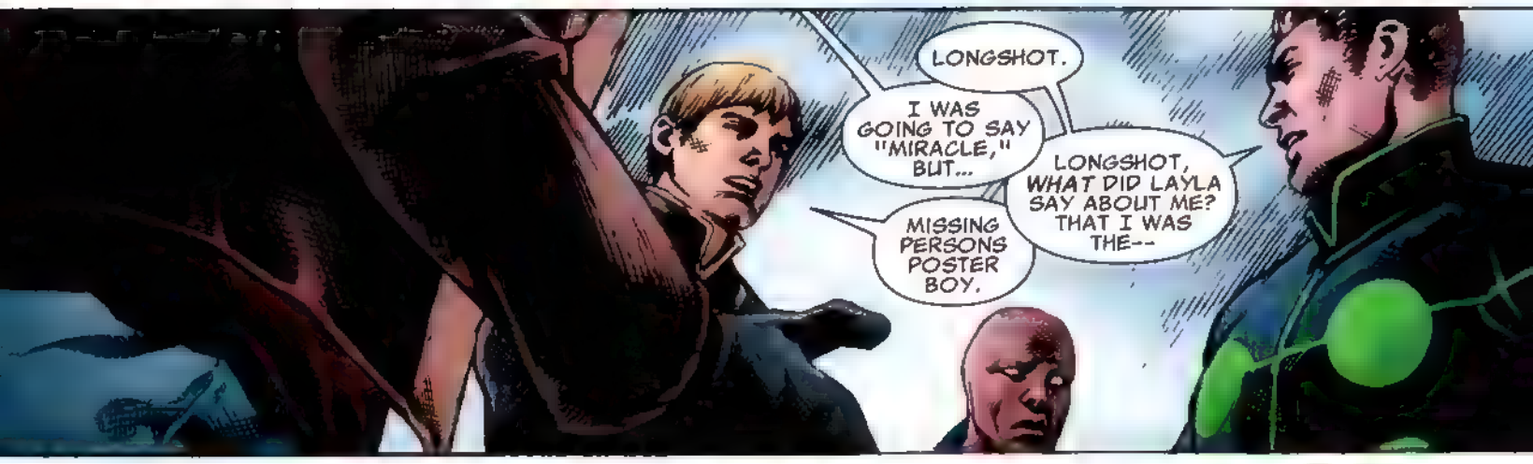
OOOOF!
UNHHH!!!
I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHAT YOU TWO DO TO EACH OTHER. PUMMEL EACH OTHER INTO MULCH FOR ALL I CARE.
BUT FIRST THE HUMAN PIGSTICKER HERE SENDS ME BACK.
I'M NOT EXACTLY HUMAN, ACTUALLY--
I DON'T CARE IF YOU WERE HATCHED FROM A FABERGE EGG! SEND ME BACK!
I CAN'T!
WHY THE HELL NOT?!
BECAUSE I NEED TIME TO REGAIN MY STRENGTH! MY FOCUS! IF I TRY IT TOO SOON, I COULD WIND UP KILLING MYSELF--
--AND YOU AS WELL!
I'M OKAY WITH THAT!
LESS OKAY WITH THAT, BUT STILL--!
I NEED THREE TO FOUR HOURS AT LEAST TO RECHARGE MY ENERGIES--!
OH MY GOD! I'M A 767 IN A PIPER CUB WORLD!
WUZZAT EVEN MEAN?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT IT MAKES SENSE TO HER, AND THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH.
THIS IS ALL YER FAULT! YOU AND YER PACK OF--
DON'T YOU CARE THAT SUE'S IN TROUBLE?
SHE AIN'T IN TROUBLE!

SHE AND REED JUST HAD A SQUABBLE, IZZALL! SO SHE TOOK OFF FOR A WHILE TO COOL OFF!
TO LATVERIA?
WELL, NO, OF COURSE SHE WOULDN'T GO TO--
--LATVERIA?
HOLY CRAP. ARE WE IN...?
YES, AND SO IS SHE. THE FANTASTICAR BROUGHT HER HERE, YANKED THROUGH A VORTEX OF SOME KIND.
AW, C'MON.
LOOK DOWN.
WHAT'RE YA--?
JUST DO IT.
OH.
THE FANTASTICAR WAS HERE, BEN, AND SHE WAS IN IT.
DOOM BROUGHT HER HERE FOR SOME REASON, AND I THINK IT'D BE BEST IF WE FOUND OUT WHAT IT WAS. DON'T YOU?
DOOM SAID HE WAS DONE WITH THE FF. THAT HE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT US NO MORE.
GEE. A VILLAIN LIED. I'LL GO ALERT THE MEDIA.

NOW SINCE THIS IS DOOM'S TERRITORY, WE SHOULDN'T GO RUNNING OFF HALF-COCKED INTO--
FORGET IT. IF I'M HERE WITH FOUR HOURS TO KILL, THEN BY GOD, I'M GOING TO KILL SOMETHING.
WAIT! M! THIS IS--
I'M IN!
IS THIS "DOOM" DANGEROUS?
WORST OF THE WORST.
FANTASTIC.
GUYS! WAIT--!
YOU WAIT!
IS THAT DOOM'S CASTLE IN THE DISTANCE?
YEP.
LET'S GO KNOCK IT DOWN AND SEE IF THE INVISIBLE WOMAN IS IN IT.
I LIKE YER STYLE, KID.
AS DO I.
YOU I'M STILL GONNA CLOBBER WHEN THIS IS OVER.
I EAGERLY AWAIT YOUR EFFORTS.

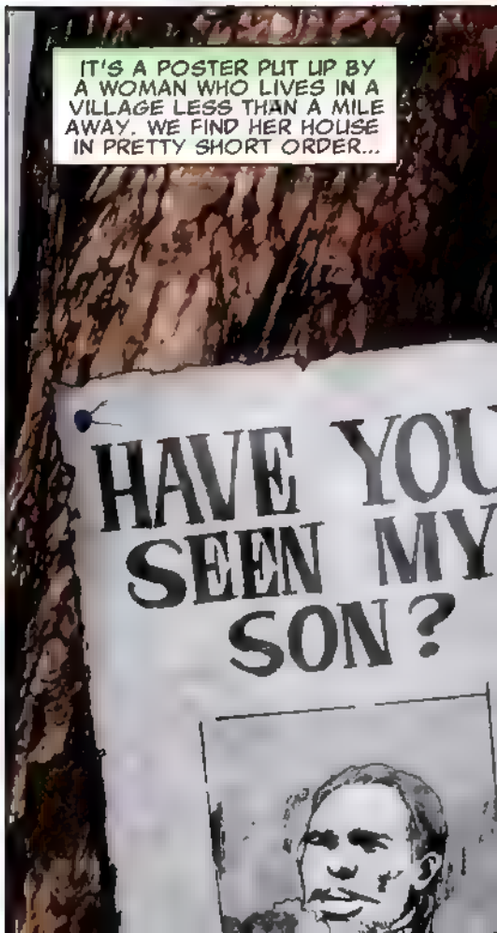
PERFECT. SO MUCH FOR THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE... OR THE SUBTLE APPROACH...OR...


SO DO WE GO AFTER THEM?
OF COURSE WE DO! MONET ISN'T THINKING CLEARLY. WHO KNOWS WHAT SHE COULD GET INTO?
BUT CATCHING UP WOULD BE A--


LONGSHOT.
I WAS GOING TO SAY "MIRACLE," BUT...
LONGSHOT, WHAT DID LAYLA SAY ABOUT ME? THAT I WAS THE--
MISSING PERSONS POSTER BOY.

RIGHT. THAT WAS IT.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T KNOW LAYLA. SHE SPEAKS TWO LANGUAGES: ENGLISH AND CRYPTIC.
THAT'S FOR SURE. BUT...SO?

SO I THINK I MAY HAVE DECRYPTED HER.


IT'S A POSTER PUT UP BY A WOMAN WHO LIVES IN A VILLAGE LESS THAN A MILE AWAY. WE FIND HER HOUSE IN PRETTY SHORT ORDER...
HAVE YOU SEEN MY SON?

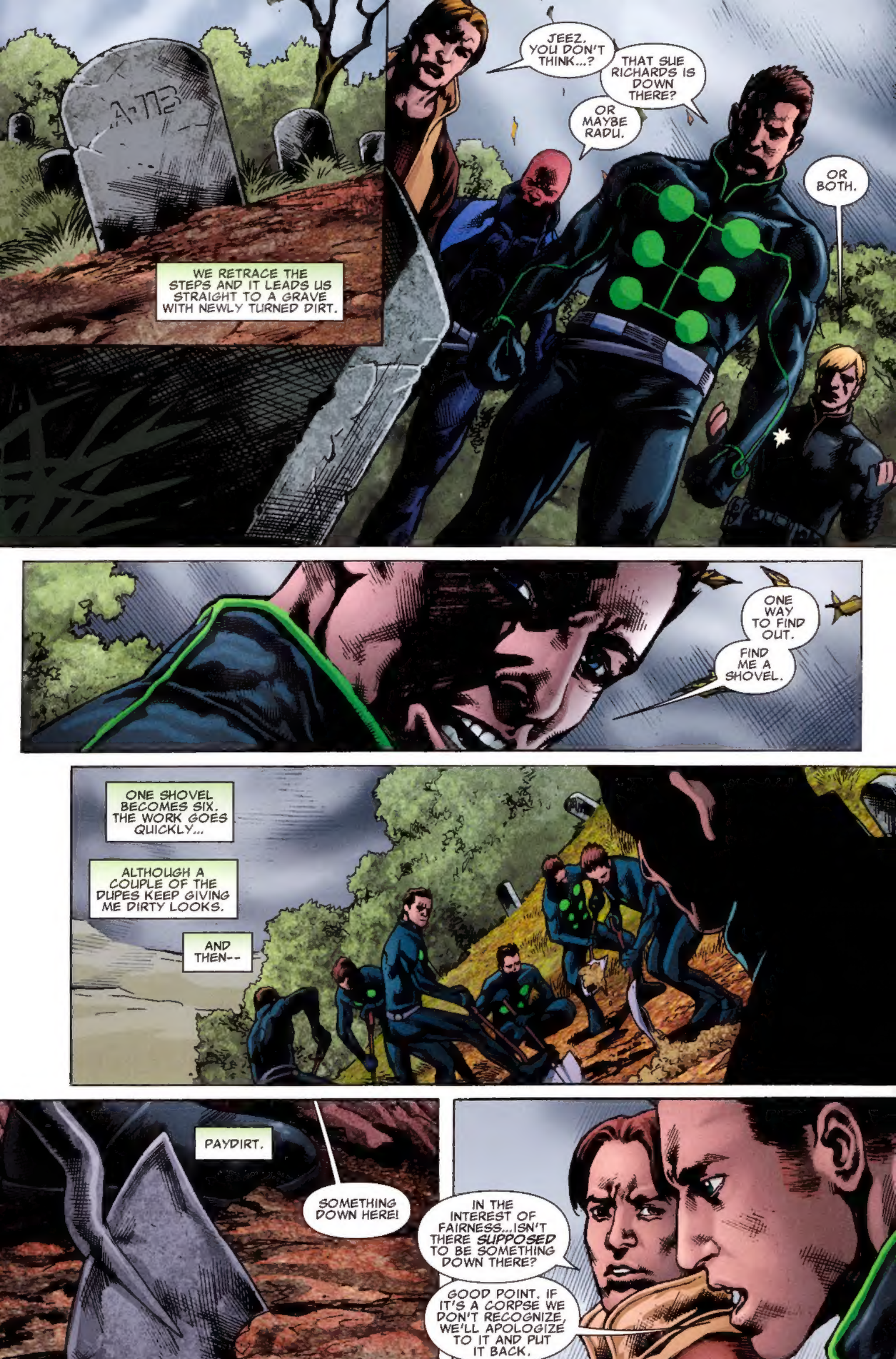
SHE DOESN'T ASK WHAT A BUNCH OF AMERICANS ARE DOING AT HER DOOR. SHE'S JUST THAT DESPERATE.
TURNS OUT HER SON IS THE GROUNDSKEEPER AT THE LOCAL CEMETERY.
WE'D JUST HAD SUCH HEAVY RAINS, JUST BEFORE THE WEATHER TURNED SO COLD.
AND ONE NIGHT RADU JUST DIDN'T COME BACK.
THE POLICE, THEY SAY HE PROBABLY JUST WANDERED OFF AFTER SOME WOMAN. THEY SAY HE'LL BE BACK, BUT I...I DON'T--
WE'LL LOOK INTO IT.

WHICH IS HOW WE WIND UP WANDERING AROUND IN A CEMETERY.
WELL, IF WE'RE LOOKING FOR *FOOTPRINTS*, WE'RE IN LUCK. THE RAIN MADE IT MUDDY, AND THE COLD WEATHER FROZE EVERYTHING.

MADROX. CHECK THIS ONE OUT.
WHY?
NO IDEA. JUST A *HUNCH*. BUT MY HUNCHES TEND TO BE LUCKY.

HUNH. *THAT'S* ODD.
WHAT IS?

LONGSHOT... STAND AT THE FOOTPRINT RIGHT BEHIND THIS ONE.
RICTOR... DARWIN...GO STAND NEXT TO THE ONES THAT FOLLOW IT.
YOU SEE IT?
AVERAGE FOOT STRIDE OF A MAN IS ABOUT TWO AND A HALF FEET...
THESE ARE *MORE*...AND KEEP INCREASING WITH EACH STRIDE.
MAYBE HE WAS RUNNING.
NO WAY. WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION'S EVEN. RUNNING GUY WOULD HAVE *MORE* WEIGHT ON THE BALLS OF HIS FEET.
YUP.
WHICH MEANS THIS GUY WAS IN A HURRY...BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE TO RUN TO MOVE FASTER.
ALL HE HAD TO DO...
WAS STRETCH HIS LEGS.
CRIPES. MR. FAN-FREAKING-TASTIC HIMSELF.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WE RETRACE THE STEPS AND IT LEADS US STRAIGHT TO A GRAVE WITH NEWLY TURNED DIRT.
JEEZ. YOU DON'T THINK...?
THAT SUE RICHARDS IS DOWN THERE?
OR MAYBE RADU.
OR BOTH.
ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.
FIND ME A SHOVEL.
ONE SHOVEL BECOMES SIX. THE WORK GOES QUICKLY...
ALTHOUGH A COUPLE OF THE DUPES KEEP GIVING ME DIRTY LOOKS.
AND THEN--
PAYDIRT.
SOMETHING DOWN HERE!
IN THE INTEREST OF FAIRNESS...ISN'T THERE *SUPPOSED* TO BE SOMETHING DOWN THERE?
GOOD POINT. IF IT'S A CORPSE WE DON'T RECOGNIZE, WE'LL APOLOGIZE TO IT AND PUT IT BACK.

THIS THING IS SOLDERED SHUT OR SOMETHING. NOT A CRACK IN IT.
HOW DO WE GET IT OPEN?
NOT A PROBLEM.
YOUR KNIVES CAN CUT THROUGH METAL?
THEY CAN CUT THROUGH ANYTHING.
SWEET.
NOW WE SEE WHAT REED RICHARDS THOUGHT WAS SO IMPORTANT THAT HE HAD TO--
HUUUUNHHHH
...HIDE IT...HERE...

NEXT ISSUE

ComicHost & Steam

Team-DCP